

PREDATION ON THE CANE TOAD (*BUFO MARINUS*) BY THE BLACK KITE (*MILVUS MIGRANS*). *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 38(2):512. 1995:- Since the introduction of the Cane Toad into Australia in 1935 there have been several reports of native fauna that have been adversely affected by preying upon them (Covacevich & Archer, 1975; Covacevich & Couper 1992) however several native animals [Water Rats (*Hydromys chrysogaster*), Crows (*Corvus* spp.), Koels (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) and Keelback Snakes (*Tropidonophis mairii*)] are known to prey successfully on them with no obvious toxic effect (Covacevich & Archer, 1975; Covacevich & Ingram, 1990). Herein we report predation upon Cane Toads by nesting Black Kites in July 1995.

During surveys of the Ross River Dam area AJ observed several Black Kite nests with toad remains on the ground below them. Detailed observations were made on a single Black Kite nest in a paperbark tree (*Melaleuca nervosa*) beside a farm dam approximately 24km South West of Townsville, north-east Queensland (Map No. 8259 Grid Ref. 715 480). While there were no young in the nest, six Black Kites were perched around the nest and in adjacent trees.

Over twenty toad remains were observed lying on the ground below the nest. Furthermore, there were toad remains hanging from branches beside the nest suggesting that the Black Kites had fed portions of Cane Toad to the young in the nest. Close inspection of the toads revealed that they had had portions of their internal organs removed. The toads appeared to have been opened from the ventral surface presumably allowing the Kites to avoid the toxic glands on the dorsal surface. This observation corroborates with Lavery (1969) who reported toad remains in gut-analyses of Black Kites in Townsville (along with Hylid and Lymnodynastine frogs).

One of us (AJ) has observed Black Kites hovering around the edge of dams presumably looking for prey and as Cane Toads are known to hide in hoof prints near the water during

the day (JMHI, pers obs.) we suspect that they were actively searching for them.

Our observations suggest that Black Kites have adapted their behaviour to exploit this introduced amphibian despite its toxicity. Firstly it has learned to find and capture Cane Toads in their diurnal refuges. Secondly it has learned to eat the internal organs of the Cane Toad avoiding the toxins concentrated on the dorsal surface. Black Kites are an abundant predator in the Townsville region that could influence Cane Toad populations. We hypothesize that this predator, along with other native animals which are adapting their behaviour to eat Cane Toads, will reduce toad populations and hence the impact of this introduced amphibian on the Australian environment.

Literature Cited

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